

## **Transcription: John Sturrock**

---

*Today is Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009. This is Bill O'Hara with the General Land Office. I am interviewing Mr. John Allen Sturrock of Woodville, Texas, and Mr. Sturrock was a lieutenant in the Marine Corps, is that correct?*

**John Sturrock:** No, the U.S. Navy.

*The U.S. Navy. I'm sorry about that.*

**John Sturrock:** That's all right.

*In the U.S. Navy. I was looking on your form you filled out. This interview is taking place by phone. I am in my office and Mr. Sturrock is in his house in Woodville. Mr. Sturrock's address is 1910 U.S. Hwy 69 South in Woodville.*

**John Sturrock:** 75979.

*Yes, and this interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. OK, now we're gonna start with some questions. We'll start off with a few easy ones. When is your birthday and where were you born?*

**John Sturrock:** Well, I was born in northeast of Colmesneil, northwest of Colmesneil, excuse me, which is about 12 miles north of here, a smaller town. Woodville is the county seat and I was born February the 17<sup>th</sup>, 1919, and that makes me 90 plus.

*Congratulations. That's great.*

**John Sturrock:** Born in the country out there on Billum Creek, and Billum Creek was named after an Indian chief named Billum that roamed that country in years past.

*What kind of Indians were they?*

**John Sturrock:** I'm not sure, but I think they probably were the Cherokee or the Alabama Casala. Now the Alabama Casala has a reservation between here and Livingston, which Livingston is 30 miles, so halfway out there is the Alabama Casala reservation. Now they came out of Louisiana, but there were Indians here in Texas a long time ago and up around Peachtree Village which is near Chester, they had a big settlement up there at one time, and I'm not sure what tribes they belong to, but they were peaceful.

*OK. And what are your parents' names?*

**John Sturrock:** Well, my father was Floyd Sturrock and my mother was Molly Shilling Sturrock. She was a Shilling before she married. I'm the youngest of six children and the only one surviving and only one of two that went in the service. My brother who was just older than me finally got drafted. But all of them got into, most of them were married and had families and were working, so they were not drafted. My situation developed, I graduated from Colmesneil High School in 1938. Now I'm a Depression raised kid and I hope we don't get back into

something like that. However, we lived on a small farm and are you getting some of that noise coming in?

*I hear a little something in the background.*

**John Sturrock:** Well that's the scanner and I asked my wife to turn it down. She may have to turn it down some more.

*I can barely hear it, sir.*

**John Sturrock:** But we had plenty of food but no money. I hope somebody will record, I did some recording and now I've lost it. At my age, I lose a lot of things. It's still here somewhere about growing up during the Depression, and it was an interesting that I'd like to have recorded that my mother finished school back in the days when she grew up, she was born in 1883, but she didn't have a lot of education but she was an awfully good woman and during the Depression, the train that passed about a mile from our house was an uphill from \_\_\_\_ in Colmesneil which is about 15 miles, and they had long trains during the Depression but just one engine on it. Now you see about five or six. But anyway they couldn't pull that hill and you'd hear 'em flipping. They'd cut the brakes and cut the train and haul half of it up and put it on a switch and then go back and get the rest of it. When they did, they put everybody that was ridin' off that they could find. So those people hit the highway and the first house that they came to was ours, and the most I know of, and we didn't count 'em much, but I think she fed 43 people one day that came by. So we had a soup line at our house but it wasn't official. But I graduated and luckily with some good help of some people I got a scholarship to play basketball at Stephen F. Austin University which is about 70 miles north of here. Then it was a state college and now it's Stephen F. Austin University. But I was lucky enough to break my collarbone playing football, so I lost my scholarship. But the coach said Sturrock, I'll let you come back this summer and finish your one year so you'll have your scholarship out. So luckily, they put in, they only had one dormitory and that was the boy's dormitory where we were stayin' and they were building the girl's first dormitory for the girls in '39 or '40, somewhere along in there. But they put a cafeteria, it was built so you could so they opened up a cafeteria so they could feed people. They would feed the athletes and then other students that wanted to come and eat. So I went back that summer and that's when they started that, and they brought in a lady that graduated from Texas Tech named Christine Barias, and she was a dietician, so she started that, and she hired me to open the cafeteria in the morning and come back at 11 o'clock and serve, and she gave me a job paying room, board and tuition, which was better than the athletic scholarship. So I graduated in '42 with the best scholarship in town. I have a feeling that the Lord posted some people for me along the way, all the way through. But who in the world, she didn't know me, and I think the coach just talked to her and other people said this old boy is a country boy and doesn't have a dime, but he'll work. But anyway that's how I finally got through school and I was in SFA on working in the cafeteria when the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor didn't mean much to me because I'd never been out, hardly been out of the county, you know, and I didn't find out about it until I got it from my roommate. They put three in a room and they weren't very big, but we had a radio. So they told me that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, and that's how I found out about it on December the 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941. Within a few weeks after we got back in January after the Christmas holidays, and by the way there was not a bus running from Nacogdoches south which would come through to Beaumont if we could come through Woodville. So when I got ready to come home from when they shut down the holidays, I had to thumb it. That was my transportation, ride the thumb.

*Yeah, and how was that?*

**John Sturrock:** Well it was real good because people would pick you up, didn't have any problem, and you didn't have any problem getting in a car with somebody. You couldn't do that now, but I'm sorry to say. The only thing about it after you got to Zavala coming south out of Lufkin, there wasn't much traffic coming through Woodville then on south, so sometimes I'd walk a few miles before I caught another ride to get home. But I made it back and forth. But my parents, we didn't have any money during the Depression and the Depression was still on in '39, '38 and '39. So after Pearl Harbor, now we'll go back to that, in January when we got back to school, there was a recruiter come from the Navy and said you boys that are seniors now, we'll offer you a real good program called the V7 program. That means you finish, you go on, and join up and be sworn in and go on inactive duty. When you graduate we'll call you to active duty and send you to officer candidate school. So that's what we did. Bobby Clifford was one of my roommates, and he and I went down to Houston and I guess it must've given us the bus tickets so we didn't have any money to buy one. I don't know how, we got to Houston on the bus anyway. We got down there and to get into the V7 program that we had, you had to weigh 135 pounds. Bobby just weighed 133. And I had high blood pressure, too much to get passed. So this doctor, and I'm guessing he was an Army retired doctor that called back in, and he was kind of brush and abrupt, but he said Bobby Clifford, you eat all the bananas you can and come back tomorrow. And he said sir, if you take this pill tonight and ya'll come back in the morning, we'll see you. So the next morning we passed. And I graduated in May and then they called me up in July, and Bobby graduated in May and we didn't see each other until after the war because he went to New York to engineering school and I went to Chicago, well I went to Notre Dame for 30 days of basic training, and then to northwestern campus in Chicago the next 60 days.

*You did your basic training at Notre Dame?*

**John Sturrock:** Yeah, so I tell people I'm a graduate of Notre Dame in northwestern \_\_\_\_\_. And I am. And they called us 90-day wonders. And I'll tell you, it's a wonder that we made it because they crammed, you just think about it, they pick up a boy out here like me, never seen a ship in my life and didn't know anything about the terminology and suddenly you have to learn all that and how to navigate. It's a wonder we made it.

*So what was it like going up there to Notre Dame when you'd barely been out of your county?*

**John Sturrock:** I was surprised at how everybody there, they had all kinds of students, football players, not on the team, but I'm talking about just intramural, that's why it was so popular I guess because man, they loved to play football up there. We had 30 days of intensive drilling and then they transferred us to Northwestern, and graduated as an ensign on December the 24<sup>th</sup>, 1942. They had called me for active duty, I think it was in July, by the time I got up there. Most everybody had orders long before they graduated, but I didn't have, and they didn't have until they sent me to the west coast for further training. So I caught a slow train through Arkansas. I didn't have any money to buy, I guess they had gave you some, I don't know, we had some money, they paid us some money. But anyway, I caught a train without a ticket and paid for it, got myself right through, slow train through Arkansas back to east Texas, and I had so many days at home. I don't remember, 10 days home before I reported. So I reported, went to San Diego. Then I stayed there a little while and they sent me to San Pedro and ended up in Santa Barbara. They had a section base at Santa Barbara so I spent about, it was the middle of '44 on the west coast for further training. I really enjoyed it. And then they assigned us to a group to go to Miami for sub chaser training, and they had a ship for us that was the APD-01, the USS

Kinsey which was being built in Charleston. They put the crew through, the crew went to Miami to train and then in early 1944, yeah, still in '44, so we went up to Charleston, and I've got some information I can read on that, but I would say that the APD started out being a DE. Now a DE was a destroyer escort. Now the real destroyers that got about a 45-knot speed limit, and we came up with about 35, so we were not quite as speedy as a destroyer or as big, and the destroyer had five 5-inch guns, and we had one, and we had 20's and 40's, anti-aircraft guns. And the Kinsey was named after a young flyer that was killed in the Coral Sea early in the war, and his mother then came and christened the ship and they commissioned it. But before they did that, they changed it over to an APD which was different from a DE in that you carried some extra troops, you got some more landing craft boats, rubber boats, and you could haul about 40 to 45 Marines aboard, and that's what we ended up doing, auxiliary personnel destroyer was what our name was, but it was the hull of a DE, which had about 180 men and about 13 officers aboard. We had a doctor aboard. And they had a lot more supply room because, and we carried Marines a bit at a time, and the Marines were landing in those islands in the Pacific. I'll talk about that in a few minutes. But that's why we took off after the ship was christened, and all the officers and crew aboard, and we went to Bermuda for shakedown in the Atlantic. Everybody but two or three got sea sick in the Atlantic, and I was fortunate. I never got sea sick and I don't know why.

*You were just a natural sailor.*

**John Sturrock:** I guess so, but I didn't know it. Then we went from Bermuda to Norfolk, Virginia, and there they did the repairs that we needed to do. We did all kind of maneuvers on the shakedown so we could find out what needed to be done. So they got it fixed up and loaded up with supplies and headed for the west coast and went through the Panama Canal. We left Norfolk from January the 1<sup>st</sup> 1945. I remember that. I've got some stuff written down about the ship, but I don't think it's necessary to tell that. We went through the Canal and that was an experience for me, where they put you in and fill it up with water and lifted you up and moved you across. Then we ended up up the west coast, and one of our seamen, chief petty officer got sick, and he had an attack of appendicitis, so we put the ship in the best possible position and the doctor and his crew operated on him and removed his appendix and it was successful. I don't know how, but anyway it was. We put him ashore in San Pedro. Then we went up to San Francisco and headed for Pearl Harbor, and then a few stops. We were heading for the Philippines, and we arrived in Leyte about two weeks after MacArthur returned. You know when he left the Philippines. You're not a military man, you don't know, but he told them, said I shall return. And he did, and he got back, so he had just gotten back in the Philippines when we were there. We were making up a bunch of LST's, LCI's, for the pre-invasion of Okinawa which was the last big deal before the war ended. We left there and it took about 10 days to get up there and we arrived at Okinawa area on March the 23<sup>rd</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup>. Anyway the president, if you look up when Roosevelt died, I think that was maybe the day we got there. But now D-day for Okinawa was April the 1<sup>st</sup>. So we were there for five or six days, and we had quite an experience there. I don't know, there's an article on it and I could read it, but I guess I can just as well tell it. But we arrived there and were going to go on patrol duty. We had sonar and radar both, and so we were one of the picket ships that would protect the ones that were already there in the harbor. They had a bunch of stuff arrive there. And lo and behold we looked up and there were two Japanese boats, and there was a destroyer over on our port bow, that's on the left side for non-Navy people, and the destroyer was firing at 'em, and then we started firing at 'em, and the one we were shooting at dived on the destroyer. We heard a loud explosion and of course we were firing at the other one and then looked over there and that one had crashed on the fan tail of the destroyer.

*Oh no.*

**John Sturrock:** Destroyer was fighting the fire, so we didn't have time to look at it because the other one was diving on us. The story that's been written up was by the supply officer, and he wrote, he could type and we couldn't, but anyway he said that, my story's a little different than his. What he did, I think he locked in on us, and didn't try to shoot us or bomb us, he was gonna ram us, he was gonna crash. But we were going at flank speed which is about 35 knots, and I think he misjudged our speed. But anyway, the captain gave an order for hard right, which pushed your bow to the right and your stern wheeling, shooting to the left, you understand what I'm saying?

*Yeah.*

**John Sturrock:** And he missed us by about 10 or 15 feet, and I think if we'd have gone straight on, he'd have hit the fan tail. So I think the Lord put somebody down there that knew how to navigate, or I wouldn't have been here because my job, I was communications officer, and my job was on the bridge, unprotected, with a helmet on, and a life jacket. So if he'd have crashed mid-section, that's where he was headed, I'd have been right in the middle of it. But he never did fire. We fired 5-inch guns and we had twin 40's and twin 20's, and we were firing everything we had, except one, I think one boy got up and run, but anyway and he was court marshaled. But we put a lot of fire power into it and he didn't waiver. Now Shaverly that wrote the article said he did a little up-turn, but I think he locked in and misjudged the speed and by the ship yawling to the left, I think about where he hit was where we would've been if we hadn't have done that hard right. But anyway, that was our breakout and the first time any of us, there might have been some of the older seamen that had been in combat before, but we hadn't. That was really a wakeup call because my goodness, the destroyer with all that fire power and us with not near that much.

*So that was your first, your combat engagement.*

**John Sturrock:** I wanted to say this. I've felt like we served, most of us, because we wanted to. We didn't wait to be drafted, and even after we got back, and I used the GI Bill to go to school and get another degree, but just in the last few years I've started using the benefits they offered as far as medical is concerned, and I just felt like I had such a good deal, a bed every night, meals served every day, and our supply officer was an employee of Nabisco, I believe, and he was a Yankee horse trader, and every time we'd get into port, he'd find out some supply ships there and he had something that they wanted and he'd trade with them, so he fed us good. We had a good time, the bed was always dry, we didn't get hit, but we were lucky. We had some more and I'll talk about those in a minute. So I wasn't marching through like some of my friends did. My brother-in-law, that became my brother-in-law, was in the tank in Germany and they had it tough, and so I just felt like they needed it and I didn't, but people finally convinced me to go ahead and get my medicine from the VA which has helped out very much. We continued to patrol, and what we did now, we had our Marines aboard, and they were veterans of the South Pacific that had been in some tough combat areas, they went on at night, they went in rubber rafts and carried very few guns with them. They had to carry a few. What they wanted to do was get into every little island that they sent us to to find out if the Japanese had people on it or not. So at night we were up. We had to go to general quarters when you're out at night, and during that \_\_\_ time it was bright moonlight, and I think we called it bogeyman because the planes coming in from Japan and off of Okinawa both could see you pretty good in the moonlight. If it was dark, you had not very good sight, but we lost some men, one drowned

when the boat turned over and the other one got killed on the island. But we were ordered to the island where Ernie Pyle got killed. It was a pretty big island this side of Okinawa, called Kuramarata. We were ordered there two or three times, and then the orders would change. When they finally went in to that island, the Japanese were ready for us on Kuramarata. And that's where Ernie Pyle, the great writer, got killed. But the Lord blessed us in a number of ways, I tell you. Now after we got through patrolling after the Marines came back on, then we were on duty and a submarine especially after it went into Okinawa proper when all the ships got there. The other interesting thing that I wanted to say about when we were going up the access, Tokyo Rose was the one that broadcast to us in the Navy and the Pacific. Actually Sally in Germany, but Tokyo Rose played good music and she would come on and say you GI's, you ought to go home, said the ships are all sunk and your girlfriend you left behind is marrying somebody, so she gave us a hard fit, but I was amused she said the ships were all sunk, and we were escorting that bunch of ships, I guess 40 or 50 at least, and then some more coming behind us and some ahead of us. So everywhere you looked there were ships and she was saying all your ships are sunk, you know. But the Japanese had a pretty good deal worked out for us at Okinawa. They would send down a single plane and if he got within range, then everybody had to go to general quarters. That was required. And he'd fly around for an hour or so and then he'd leave, and just when you got retired from general quarters, another one would come and do the same thing. So they kept you up night and day. I got so sleepy I couldn't hardly stand it. You had to be, in general quarters you had to go do it and you had to batten the ship down so if you got hit, you wouldn't be – another thing I wanted to say, we lost a lot of ships at Okinawa. The destroyers were placed out about 15 miles from the island, at least on three sides, and they were to pick up the incoming ships, planes from Japan, and most of those planes from Japan at the last part of that campaign didn't have enough gasoline to get home. So they were coming to hit something, and they would attack those, they would call picket ships, they were destroyers. But they would attack those destroyers on that picket line in mass, three, four or five of 'em at one time, trying to dive on 'em and sometimes they would fire guns but most of the time they'd just crash 'em. So I saw 'em coming back in with the bows blown off or with the sterns blown off. I don't know how many we lost, but we lost a lot of ships. And we almost had the big ships ship to ship, you know, with airplanes and carriers. They carried that war a lot further away, but the big battleship was coming down from Japan and we had a bunch of the battleships of ours, including the Texas, at Okinawa, because they shelled that place for days before they landed until there wasn't anything left standing. Unfortunately when we got on the island, the Japanese at least on the south end were in caves, so they didn't have – the Marines took the north end and the Army took the south end and the Marines in about two weeks, they covered the north end and they said man, they're much better than the Army. We'll take the Marines and put 'em in with the Army down here, and they all bogged down because they had to get 'em out cave by cave, and that was some tough fighting on that island. You got some questions, you want me to slow down?

*No sir, I'm listening. These are great stories.*

**John Sturrock:** The patrolling after we got our Marines back aboard and after they found out what was on the island. We kept 'em aboard for a while and I think then we transferred them off. But they were throwing their little rifles away and I'm trying to think of the name of them, a little automatic rifle, they were throwing them overboard, so we told 'em man, don't throw things overboard, because they wanted to get a new issue. So I bought one from one of the Marines, but I tell you, they wouldn't let me bring it home. I used it later on when we were in the mine fields. The carbine is what it was.

*Oh, little carbine. Was there something wrong with them, or why were they throwing them off?*

**John Sturrock:** They had 'em for a while, that was the culture. You lose your rifle, you can get another one, so they lost it. We had one Marine that went berserk. I tell you, they had a pretty tough fight.

*So it was the Marines that were going into the caves to -*

**John Sturrock:** It was Marines and Army both. This was on the main island of Okinawa. They landed on April the 1<sup>st</sup> and I think went clean across the island before they got intercepted, but the Japanese were waiting in their caves. They were not, it took a long time. But we would patrol at night and we had some planes that flew over pretty low, scared them and us both I think, and then we had a Beddick which is a light bomber, two-engine, that landed in front of us. I guess he got shot down. But anyway, we were on patrol, and a submarine patrol, but anyway he landed and he was going to try to land on us, so he pancaked and went right over the top of us and sunk around and then we were so busy working, couldn't get it. So later we sent some boats down there and they found, captured three or four people, and the captain got tangled up in some of the equipment and he was dead, but we got some prisoners and brought 'em in. But the battle of the ships, a big one was coming down to take on ours and he had more fire power than our ships did, but he turned back. I don't know what happened. So that was kind of – we stayed there until May. They sent us off for two weeks on some island called Mog Mog Island south of there for R&R. I never went back, we stayed until July, and they sent us back to the States to put on some different radar and different equipment for the invasion of Japan. So we were in San Pedro in Los Angeles area harbor when the war ended. Instead of leaving us there, they sent us back out and brought the kids who were out, in. But I want to say this, and I hear a lot of people talking about well, we should never have used the atomic bomb, but based on what happened on Iwo Jima and what we ran into on Okinawa, if we'd have gone into the homeland, they would have been dug out and ready for us, so I think we would have lost a lot more people, both sides, than killed in the two atomic bombs that were dropped on, I've forgotten the name of the place where it was.

*Yeah, Nagasaki and the other one, Hiroshima.*

**John Sturrock:** Then we instead of leaving us out, they sent us back to the Philippines, and then we went over to French Indochina, which is now something else. I think that's where we fought. But anyway, and we were the escort and did escort the big troop ships with the Chinese nationals up in north China, Chinguan Town. Now this is after the war is over. We went up there, escorted 'em up there, and man, if you look at the map, that's up there cold, and we got into an area just dug into winter. The harbor where we were froze over. So they started to send us back up on patrol somewhere and we got out and ice would just break and you couldn't steer. You'd just go where the ice broke. We started, it was diesel, and we started the intake for sea water to keep it cool started freezing, the intake froze up, so we had to back out of there because we couldn't go if we couldn't have the water to keep our engines cool. But I've never been so cold in my life.

*And how long were you up there?*

**John Sturrock:** Well, until, I finally got enough, then they worked up a system of getting enough points to get you out, get you discharged, relieved from active duty is what it was. And we were up there until middle of, April of '46 and I got enough points. So I got back to China. I

got enough points to come home, so I got orders to, there was a ship there going back to Japan and in Japan they had a crew ship, big ATD that carried passengers, coming back to the States, so I caught the ship to Japan and then caught the other one back to the States and was released in the spring of '46.

*And so you saw active duty for how long?*

**John Sturrock:** Almost four years.

*Wow.*

**John Sturrock:** I told 'em 3 years, 8 months, 25 days, 6 days and 2 hours. I was ready to come home.

*I bet you were.*

**John Sturrock:** The problem was each day was just, and going from San Francisco to the Philippines, and it takes a long time, it's just like every other day. You know, you are 4 on, 8 off. So you lose time. I was communications officer so I felt like I broke down all the messages before even the captain got to see 'em. They sent out all, in other words we had some machines in code and we had several different levels of encoding. They had a machine that you typed in the, you set the thing for the day, put the wheels in for the day, and typed in your message, and it encoded it in five letters, and then skip five letters and then skip, and then if you got that message, you could put it on decoding and type in the coded message and it would come out plain English. So it was real -

*So every message you got, they were all coded, and you would decode 'em.*

**John Sturrock:** Well, most of them were. You didn't get many, well, when you were in Okinawa you could talk, but the problem was they didn't want the Japanese to know where the USS Kinsey was and other ships the same way. So we had call letters and they would broadcast, in the Pacific they broadcast all the time in code, and they wrote call letters for all the ships at sea, and the following ships at sea. So if your code number was in that, then you were supposed to type in that message. So it was something for you, might be an officer being promoted. That's the way you found out when you got promoted from ensign to lieutenant JG and then from JG to lieutenant senior grade. They don't call it senior grade, it's two stripes like an Army captain or a Marine captain, same thing. I've got my officer candidate here and I've got the story that Shaverly wrote of the USS Kinsey, and it was a ship, did I say how many people? 13 officers and 183 men.

*Yes, a doctor. And 40 Marines.*

**John Sturrock:** Yeah, didn't have the Marines all the time, just when they were needed. Some of them had been with Carlson Brady in the Pacific, made a name for themselves early in the Pacific.

*When you carried 40 Marines, did you have separate quarters for them on the ship?*



**John Sturrock:** Yeah, that's what the changeover made from the DE to the APD, put in quarters for them, and then extra boats, some landing boats, and then extra storage, food capacity, because you're feeding an extra 40 men, it takes a lot more food than you had to start with.

*So I guess you had more capacity for food storage, but did you have the same number of cooks cooking? They were just cooking more food I guess.*

**John Sturrock:** I don't know.

*I had a question though, Mr. Sturrock, when you were decoding messages from other ships, did you have to decode, were you receiving Japanese communications as well, and decoding them or was somebody else doing that?*

**John Sturrock:** I was not. Now they broke the Japanese code. They knew a lot of stuff that was going on. No, what I had was, and different ships, battleships had different, and carriers and destroyers had a higher, more sophisticated coding the stuff than we did, and if the ship sunk, I was supposed to blow that up so that they couldn't find out about it. And every day the code changed. You had to have, if you set the wheels wrong, it wouldn't work. Then they had another one like a slide rule, and then of course we indicated by semifor and then communicated with other ships with flags on your yardarm.

*OK. I have a few more questions here.*

**John Sturrock:** All right.

*You may have already answered this question, but where were you when the atomic bomb was dropped? Were you in California at that point?*

**John Sturrock:** Yeah.

*And what were your thoughts on that, do you recall?*

**John Sturrock:** Well, the story was there was going round that there was something big coming, before they dropped it, and nobody knew what it was, but it was, I thought, I don't know whether I thought it would end the war or not. I guess I did because thinking about a while ago and I didn't say this, when we were in school, I majored in history and government, and our professor didn't think, didn't give us any information that we were about to be in war, so I don't think the people knew that the Japanese were getting ready to attack us, and I think the same thing happened when we dropped the atomic bomb. I don't think anybody knew. We didn't have quite as good a communication system, no television.

*No TV, no Internet.*

**John Sturrock:** It was an interesting thing, I became after they started getting points off, when we went back out after the war I was navigator, executive officer, and I had done a lot of, I practice navigation because I wanted to learn how to do it. But we would take some lines and then star sights at night, and learned how to do that, but if it was cloudy, you didn't have any. You just had to go by dead reckoning. But when we went back out, we had LORAN, long range radio, and they had stations all over the country, and if you could pick up three of them, you

could pinpoint yourself exactly. You'd tune in until you found the station in Okinawa, and one in the Philippines, and one on Guam, and if you get all three of 'em, but I navigated from Pearl Harbor to the Philippines going back out with LORAN and came right out exactly where I wanted to come. If you were trying to do it by stars at night, if it was cloudy you couldn't get a star sight. That was a big improvement. But now if you had this thing like you got the GPS locator now, you wouldn't have to worry about it. But we didn't have 'em then. All right, you got any more questions?

*All right, we've got a few questions here. Let's see, how would you compare the American equipment during the war to the enemy's?*

**John Sturrock:** Well, what contact we had, our equipment was good, but the Japanese were pretty, they were pretty good pilots and I think they had good planes. They just didn't have any charts as much left. Really the word went out, and I don't know how true it was because how do you know whether there's any gasoline left in that plane or not, but the word went around was that those planes that were coming after we took Okinawa and they were still coming down to harass us, they didn't have enough gasoline to get back to Japan.

*When they left, they knew they weren't going back.*

**John Sturrock:** They were not coming back. We didn't have much contact with the prisoners. They were shuffled off somewhere else. I didn't get to see any enemy.

*Yeah, you never took any prisoners on the ship.*

**John Sturrock:** Yeah we did, but we didn't keep 'em very long.

*Did you see any famous personalities while you were serving?*

**John Sturrock:** No, we just missed MacArthur. He was already gone.

*You never saw Bob Hope over there or anything like that.*

**John Sturrock:** No, sure didn't.

*Do you have any funny incidents that you remember?*

**John Sturrock:** Well, when we went into the west coast, I wanted to go to the cantines where they entertained the service men, and an officer couldn't go. So I guess I can tell this now and if they want to file on me they can, so I had some friends among enlisted people, and you know, I wasn't raised that you are a better class than I am, and so I didn't feel like I was any better off than enlisted men, so I guess I wasn't a very good officer. But anyway they lent me some enlisted men uniform, and I went to the Hollywood canteen and I saw, I can't remember her name, been so long, but if they'd have caught me, they would have put me in the brig.

*You would've been in big trouble. So you went to see a show and saw a singer?*

**John Sturrock:** Yeah, different ones would come down at different times, and they got donuts and dancing. It was a lot of fun, I enjoyed it.

*I'll bet, and officers weren't allowed to go?*

**John Sturrock:** No.

*So you became an enlisted man for a while, huh? I think I'd have done the same.*

**John Sturrock:** I started off being an enlisted man for the first 30 days, and then as an officer candidate after that. I had already had 30 days in learning how to march. And I had trouble calling, you know, the forward is the deck, and the opening is, didn't say what it was then, says the door is the hatch, so you had to learn new lingo.

*Yeah, the bathroom is the head.*

**John Sturrock:** Yeah, bathroom's the head, starboard is right and port's left.

*Yeah, I was in the Air Force, I went in the Air Force after high school. Of course this is right after Vietnam ended. There wasn't any wars ragin' but I didn't have to learn a new lingo like you did. My best friend went in the Navy.*

**John Sturrock:** Now I think French Indochina is Vietnam today, isn't it?

*I think that's right.*

**John Sturrock:** Well back then, it was still French Indochina. We ran into a lot of floating mines that had got loose. That's when I got to use my gun. I was glad because I needed to bring it home. But I bought me a carbine similar to that.

*So you used the gun to shoot at the mines and try to detonate them?*

**John Sturrock:** Yeah.

*All right, I have a couple of other questions, but here's kind of a scripted question. If there were one thing you would tell the current group of soldiers or seamen serving now, what would that be?*

**John Sturrock:** Well, I would say serve your country with distinction and honor, and enjoy it because if you don't, it'd be \_\_\_\_\_. And I know there's a lot of them coming back that are having so many suicides and stuff, and I know they went through some terrible things, but man alive, you've got to come out of this.

*So the war ended, you went over to China for a little while and you finally came home. Then what was life like for you after that?*

**John Sturrock:** Well, I got offered a job \_\_\_\_\_ in Colmesneil, was where I graduated from, and I needed, I wanted some more hours because I wasn't a very good student when I went there. I told them all I majored in Freshman English. It took me four years to pass it, you know. The Navy taught me how to study. I had to study. So when I came back, I didn't have any trouble making A's. So I wanted to go back on the GI Bill and get an ag \_\_\_\_\_, and so I went up to FFA to see what I could do. The first thing they did, they asked me, and I was married, had a child, and my wife, and they asked me would we be supervisor of the dormitory. I said yes. So we got

room and board for that. Then I got my GI funds paying for everything else, and I made more money going to school than I would teaching in Colmesneil, because they hadn't raised the salaries back then. Our government \_\_\_\_\_ who is from Woodville, Boston Woodville, got to give 'em their \_\_\_\_ pass and finally raised the salary of teachers.

*So you finished up school at FFA?*

**John Sturrock:** Yeah, I got a masters degree in '53.

*Then you went on to teach?*

**John Sturrock:** I taught a little and then I decided that wasn't me, so I went into \_\_\_\_, started working for C. Templeton and had for a while, and after then, I decided I'd get into my major which was government. I ran for county judge and got beat. Anyway, I ended up being county clerk after the county clerk ran in the primary and decided he didn't want to do that anymore. So I did that, and then ran for the county judge, and then I ran the \_\_\_\_ for 11 years.

*As county judge?*

**John Sturrock:** Yeah. So I finally used my first degree, history and government. Didn't know I was gonna do that.

*So how did you like politics?*

**John Sturrock:** I liked it all right except so many decisions are made that you don't have any control over. I found out that the decisions made in Washington, has more effect on the county than the \_\_\_\_ court decisions did. So we started working, we started lobbying our senators and recommended at the state and national level both. So we were pretty successful there. I was a pretty good friends with Mark Clyde, Ann Richards, Bill Cummins. I was a strong Democrat.

*What about Garry Morrow? Do you know him? Our Land Commissioner for 16 years.*

**John Sturrock:** Yeah.

*And Jerry Patterson is our Land Commissioner now.*

**John Sturrock:** He's after my time.

*Well Mr. Sturrock, I wanted to ask you how many children do you have?*

**John Sturrock:** Well, we have six children, three girls and three boys. Three of them live here in the Woodville area. Two girls are teachers, their husbands, one of them is an electrician and the other one is in the car business. The other one is a son and he's a super mechanic, works for his brother-in-law in the car business, and then we have four JP's, justice of the peace, in Tyler County. One is a full time JP and the other three are part time, and he's a part time JP and loves it. One weekend a week, and then he works, they call him and he comes out and works.

*Well that's great.*

**John Sturrock:** So he's following his dad in politics. He decided all of a sudden he wanted to be a deputy sheriff maybe, a little while ago. He doesn't want to be the sheriff itself. He was deputy pretty quick after he got in, and they wanted him to run for sheriff and he didn't want to run for sheriff. The sheriff's job is the biggest in the county and they don't pay 'em much more than the deputy. So he's doin' all right. You know, the recession hadn't hit us very hard in Tyler County yet. I think it will.

*I hope it doesn't.*

**John Sturrock:** I hope it doesn't either because my son-in-law is married to one of the girls and his partner, they buy these low mileage used cars that have been used as rental cars and stuff, and they're still selling lots of cars. And the banks here are financing. So some of that crazy stuff went on hadn't affected Texas as bad as it does. I'm sorry that Governor Perry is not taking that money for unemployment people. I hope it's not a mistake.

*He's got a lot of pressure to change his mind.*

**John Sturrock:** You know they're going to run out of money first thing you know, and are those people going to be able to get paid? I don't know.

*I'm afraid that we may be in for some difficult times.*

**John Sturrock:** Oh I think we are.

*But I keep hoping for the best.*

**John Sturrock:** One good thing about \_\_\_\_ from now, they let the banks go broke before and if you had money then you just lost it, and they didn't have workman's comp, so you didn't get paid for that, so if you get a job, but that guy saying that the government couldn't create jobs didn't \_\_\_\_ because they reworked the courthouse here in 1936, and they paid 'em a dollar a day, and those people were just damn glad to get a dollar. They got the road work done and CCC camp was here. So a lot of people went hungry, and that's sad, but you insure that for \$200,000 now, \$250,000. May take you a while to get it, but if the bank goes broke, then you've got it. So I had a little money invested in the stock market and I'm not sure I'm gonna get that back.

*It's sad to watch your investments just go away. I know I saw my account has withered.*

**John Sturrock:** But if the company that you got it with don't go broke, 10 years from now it'll be back up.

*It might come back, yeah, that's what I'm hoping for.*

**John Sturrock:** But my problem is, I don't think I'm gonna live long enough for it to come back, but my kids will get it.

*Well you just never know. You sound pretty good on my end. I'm picturing a real healthy man, a 90-year-old man who's in pretty good shape.*

**John Sturrock:** I don't want to live to be 99 unhealthy. I had a brother lived to 93, 94, and got in pretty bad shape, couldn't talk, couldn't hear a word you said, that's not living as far as I'm concerned.

*So at 90 are you still pretty active?*

**John Sturrock:** I have a little trouble walking and I'm taking some medication I think is probably causing my balance to be off, when I first get up I have a hard time. But I use a walking stick and I don't want to stumble and fall.

*You don't weigh 135 like you did when you went in the service?*

**John Sturrock:** No, I was big in high school. I wasn't very tall, but I could out jump most of them. But I weighed 185 pounds in high school. So I'm big-boned, heavy muscled.

*How tall were you in high school?*

**John Sturrock:** 5'11-1/2", and my legs have gotten shorter. I wanted to be 6 feet but I never quite made it.

*All right Mr. Sturrock, well we're just about finished. Is there anything else you'd like to add?*

**John Sturrock:** No, I'm just happy to have this recording and I hope that when future generations want to know something about Okinawa, they'll seek this and listen. They won't get a chance to ask me, but maybe I answered their question.

*Well this interview will be there for many people to listen to for years to come.*

**John Sturrock:** All right, thank you.

*Well on behalf of Commissioner Jerry Patterson and the Texas Veterans Land Board, I would like to thank you for your service to our country and for participating in this interview. It's been a pleasure talking to you. You take care.*

**John Sturrock:** All right.

*And keep things straight out there in Tyler County.*

**John Sturrock:** Will do, bye.

*[End of recording]*